

*Changes will allow cities to use grants to re-hire laid off firefighters, ease cost sharing requirements ; Ryan to Continue Push for SAFER funds in FY 2010 Appropriations Process*

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**Washington, DC** □ □ –Congressman Tim Ryan (OH-17) a member of the powerful House Appropriations Committee that expanded the SAFER grant program as part of the fiscal year 2009 supplemental appropriations bill, vows to continue to make the grant program larger and better suited to help small and mid-sized cities that have suffered from budget cuts over the past few years. The SAFER grants are used to enhance local fire departments' abilities to comply with staffing, response and operational standards that have been set by the federal government. The committee moved to expand the scope of the SAFER grants by allowing funds to be used for the re-hiring of laid off firefighters. Today the full House of Representatives voted to pass a version of the bill that had been approved by both House and Senate negotiators.

**“Right here in our community, firefighters are being laid off because our cities aren’t generating enough revenue to keep them on the job,”** said Congressman Tim Ryan. **“By expanding the scope of these SAFER grants, more communities in the 17th Congressional District will be eligible to apply for them.□ I also encourage our local communities to be prepared to submit SAFER grant applications when the Federal government opens the application process.”**

The technical changes in the SAFER program create another tool for local cities and towns to use as they attempt to keep fire fighters on the job, but changing the language of the SAFER program would not change the competitive nature of the grant. Cities would still have to apply and be found eligible for the federal funds.

Taken with the Economic Stimulus bill that passed Congress in February, which contained language waiving the local matching requirement for SAFER grants, the bill would bring SAFER grants in line with similar grants available to local law enforcement agencies. The additional waiver authority contained in the new supplemental appropriation would allow waivers from other requirements of the grants, including the length of the grant and the amount of funding per firefighter.

In addition, on Friday the House Appropriations Committee voted on a separate bill, the Commerce, Justice and Science FY2010 funding bill, which contained an additional modification to the SAFER grants that instructs the Federal Government to take into account the number of laid-off firefighters in a community when evaluating SAFER grant applications. The CJS Appropriations Bill is expected to be voted on by the full House of Representatives this week, and is still subject to action by the Senate and must be signed by the President.

**“Small cities and towns around the country need fully-staffed fire departments to ensure the safety and security of the community,”** said Congressman Ryan. **“The federal government is in a position to help these cities and towns, and it is our duty to do so.”**